

BOOK REVIEWS

Krishnarao Shankar Pandit: A Doyen of Khayal

Neela Bhagwat

Focus Books (Popular Prakashan),
Bombay, 1992

XII + 68 pages, Rs 50

With the death of Acharya Krishnarao Shankar Pandit in August 1989 at a ripe old age, a luminous symbol of the *guru-shishya* heritage went away from our midst. Panditji was a direct inheritor of the musical wealth and style of the pioneering Khayal *gharana* of Gwalior founded by Haddu Khan and Hassu Khan. To mark his birth centenary, concerts and seminars were organized at various places this year including his home town Gwalior.

In this context Neela Bhagwat's book could have been a welcome addition to the literature on this venerable musician had its casual and confused treatment not made the book somewhat frustrating for the reader. Any modest expectations one might have had of gaining some information, some insights, some analysis of Panditji's personality and contribution grow dim as one goes through the book. Besides, there are irritants like factual errors, omissions of significant aspects of Panditji's work and emphases on irrelevant facts.

There is a factual error on page 1 itself. It was not Vishnupant Pandit who moved to Gwalior from Chinchwad (Pune) but his father Ramchandra Rao, the grandfather of Shankar Pandit. On page 5 is a reference to



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"the Pir also known as Shaikh or Khanqah". *Khanqah* does not mean a person but a place — a centre for religious gatherings of Sufis and also the abode of disciples and followers. Vishnubua Deshpande was the first principal of the Madhav Music College, not Rajabhaiyya Poonchhwale (p. 16). He occupied this position for some years and Rajabhaiyya succeeded him. Ali Hussain and his uncle Vilayat Hussain did not belong to the Agra *gharana* (p. 29). The title of Krishnarao Muley's book published in 1940 is *Bharatiya Sangeet* and not *Bharatiya Sangeet Shastra* (p. 31). The statement that Haddu Khan gave Inayat Hussain Khan his daughter's

hand in marriage but not his musical knowledge is contrary to the usually accepted view.

Based on the *guru-shishya* relationship, any oral tradition acquires an esoteric element. For traditional professional musicians, their knowledge is also the means of economic survival. The contention that this is at the root of their possessiveness about musical knowledge and of their withholding information while teaching may well be true. But it is difficult to see how the gossipy anecdotes repeated by the author in her exploration of Krishnarao Pandit as a guru can give any insight into his character. Saying that he was possessive of his knowledge or that it was difficult to learn from him, or just wondering whether he was a generous teacher, does not lead one anywhere.

There is mention of the graded curriculum followed in the school under Panditji's direction. But there is little information about Panditji's method of imparting training to disciples selected for intensive individual grooming in the *gurukula* mode with the aim of making them proficient performing musicians representing the authentic Gwalior *gayaki*. The stray remark that exposure to the *ashtanga gayaki* was mainly through concerts and that imitation of Panditji's singing was perhaps the only way of absorbing the style is the only clue.

The author's account of the much advertised 'conflict' between Panditji and Bhatkhande is mixed up. Though the sharp differences between the basic orientations of the two musicians have been well stated, strands of logical analysis are loaded with the author's confused ideas, leading to fallacious conclusions. Panditji might appear to be an aggrieved party and he might have gone through some anxious and disturbing situations because of Bhatkhande's advent, but this can hardly be termed a conflict. Both Panditji and Bhatkhande were wedded to the cause of music. The basic approach, the vision, the life mission of Bhatkhande was, however, entirely different from Panditji's. Panditji was the proud, youthful inheritor of

the rich Gwalior Khayal; preservation and projection of his inheritance together with establishing his supremacy as a singer and guru was of utmost importance to him.

Bhatkhande's primary concern, on the other hand, was the entire range of Hindustani music, comprising all the *gharanas* (including Gwalior) and traditions of *raga* manifestation through both Dhrupad and Khayal. The underlying unity of these rich diverse streams was for him the matrix to construct a system, to provide a theory and a grammar for contemporary Hindustani music. In his view theory would be the backbone of practice, and practice the substance of theory.

With this objective, Bhatkhande researched into the terms and idioms prevalent in the different oral-aural traditions and also in the relevant musicological works. After decades of devoted work he brought out in series a systematized body of literature providing a base and starting point for the further development of Hindustani music and musicology. The dissemination of this knowledge and the introduction of the system prepared by him for the classroom teaching of music was a major facet of his career. Impressed by the value and utility of Bhatkhande's work, the Maharaja of Gwalior actively supported his scheme, and under his patronage the Madhav Music College was started in 1918. It so happened that this coincided with the formal establishment of Panditji's institution, the Shankar Gandharva Vidyalaya.

The insinuation that Bhatkhande purposely offended or hurt Panditji is not true. In fact, authentic exponents of the various *gharanas* provided the substance for Bhatkhande's edifice of musical knowledge, and he valued their contribution to his cause. Among Bhatkhande's advisory notings on the working of the Madhav Music College was his specific suggestion that senior students with the ability and ambition to excel as performers should be sent to eminent performing musicians of Gwalior (one of whom was Panditji) for intensive training in perfor-

mance and concert techniques. For the same reason he put his illustrious pupil Ratanjankar under the tutelage of Faiyaaz Khan for five years. At the Lucknow Music Conference organized by Bhatkhande, along with luminaries like Allah Bande and Nasiruddin of the Dagar family, Mushtaq Hussain Khan, Faiyaaz Khan, Radhika Goswami and Chandan Chaube, Krishnarao Shankar Pandit was featured as the representative of the Gwalior *gharana*. Such was the esteem in which he was held by Bhatkhande.

In this connection the author's reference to Bhatkhande's theory of *vadi-samvadi* needs to be clarified. In fact, terms like *vadi-samvadi* were not an invention of Bhatkhande's. They had already been in vogue in different oral traditions, although in the context of totally practice-oriented training, theory did not cover much ground. The theory as such was not Bhatkhande's: he only put these terms to systematic use in his *raga*-descriptions. Panditji realized the need for a basic theory of Hindustani music (not of Khayal) for his school curriculum, for which he needed a terminology urgently. In spite of his resistance to anything connected with Bhatkhande, willy-nilly he had to accept *vadi-samvadi* along with some other terms.

Here the author promptly comes up with a solution, suggesting that Panditji could have profitably discussed this problem with the great scholar Krishnarao Muley, adapted his theory of Khayal and utilized it in his school. Based on the *graha-amsha-nyasa* trio, this theory, according to the author, facilitates improvisation. But after coming up with this suggestion she immediately withdraws it, realizing that Panditji was no theoretician and was not interested enough in the theoretical aspects of music — unlike his pupil Sharachchandra Arolkar who went to Muley to learn the aesthetics of Khayal. One wonders whether this futile exercise enhances the prestige of the "doyen of Khayal" or places Arolkar on a higher rung.

Here and elsewhere, Sharachchandra Arolkar is placed in a comparative perspec-

tive against his guru. He is centre-stage in various contexts in this book, whether it is an account of Panditji's disciples or a discussion of classicism and romanticism. Arolkar's reputation, his awards and honours, are all well deserved. But the elaborate treatment accorded to him should rightly have been reserved for a book on his work. Such frequent reference to Arolkar in a book on Krishnarao Shankar Pandit seems rather irrelevant.

A discerning reader cannot help noticing the vague and erroneous notions of the author regarding *raga*, *bandish* and creativity. One should realize that the *graha-amsha-nyasa* trio is only an aspect of the structure and anatomy of a *raga*, as is *vadi-samvadi*. The trio is not in itself a formula for creative improvisation as Bhagwat simplistically explains and recommends.

Perhaps in her enthusiasm to establish the greatness of Panditji (although that was never in doubt), the author has resorted to an extraordinary device. She has chosen one recorded *bandish* each by Panditji and two other contemporary masters, Faiyaaz Khan and Kesarbai Kerkar, and has made diagrams of the initial *avartanas*. These are then used for a comparative assessment of the relative merits of the three musicians. When the final judgement is delivered, declaring the supremacy of Panditji over Faiyaaz Khan and Kesarbai Kerkar, the reader is left both dazed and outraged. It is preposterous to believe that the art of classical masters can be assessed with the help of inaccurate diagrams of a few seconds of their music.

Under captions like 'Khayal — A Clas-
sico-Romantic Art Form', 'Panditji as an
Individual', and 'Individualism in the
Present Context', the author has presented
some information and has offered some
viewpoints. 'Panditji's Style of Singing'
presents an analysis of some of his commer-
cial discs and other recordings, spelling out
the salient features of his *gayaki* and describ-
ing his amazing mastery over varied techni-
ques. This could, in a way, serve as a guide to

those who wish to listen to his music.

At the end of the book there is a list of Panditji's recordings, comprising commercial discs and a large number of private recordings. The inclusion of the holdings of institutions such as Akashvani, where he was a regular broadcaster from very early on, Sangeet Natak Akademi, which honoured him with an Award in 1959, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts would have made the list a more meaningful document. But even as it is, the list is useful and a rewarding feature of the book.

SUMATI MUTAKAR

String Instruments of North India (Vol. II)

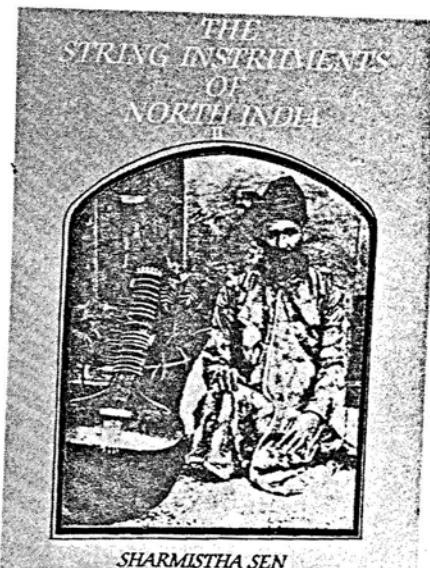
Sharmistha Sen

Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 1992

148 pages, Rs 300

Indian musicology lacks a well-documented history of our instruments or even a reliable compendium of instrumental techniques and styles. So far as Hindustani music is concerned, the situation is better in the field of vocal music, where Bhatkhande's pioneering efforts, assimilating the experience of various *gharanas*, resulted in the publication of some basic texts for both practitioners and students. In the field of instrumental music Pandit Lalmani Misra, author of *Bharatiya Sangeet Vadya*, is among the few musicians to have addressed themselves to serious research and writing. Taken as a whole, the published literature on the subject is meagre and of uneven quality.

The book under review — the second volume of a two-part work based on a doctoral thesis (1972) — attempts to fill this gap in respect of string instruments of the plucked variety: Veena, Sitar, Surbahar, Rabab, Sursingar, and Sarod. The evolution of these instruments and the development of forms



SHARMISTHA SEN

and techniques in instrumental music are dealt with, and some supporting documentation provided in the way of notations, illustrations, and genealogies. The research is primarily based on interviews and consultations with leading instrumentalists including the late Hafiz Ali Khan, Dabir Khan, Birendra Kishore Roy Choudhury, Radhika Mohan Maitra, and the author's guru Mustaq Ali Khan. Sharmistha Sen is a practising Sitar-player, and her experience as a musician no doubt lends authority to her book.

In the previous volume of this publication (1988), the author had dealt at length with the four *banis* of Dhrupad — Gaudadi, Daguri, Khandhari and Nauhari — which were "gradually assimilated into Khayal and instrumental music". In the present volume the major plucked instruments are individually discussed with an accent on their *bani* affiliations.

The first chapter deals with the Veena, providing a brief account of Veena-playing, important genealogies, and a discussion of leading Veena-players representing the Khandhar *bani* and Dagar *bani* including Asad Ali Khan, Shamsuddin Desai Faridi

and Zia Mohiuddin Dagar. Abid Hussain Khan of Indore, who in contrast with other traditional Beenkars utilizes some elements of Khayal in his recitals, is also discussed in this section. The tuning systems and playing techniques of these musicians are described in each case. A short account of the Vichitra Veena and a genealogy of its practitioners is also provided.

Chapter II deals with the Sitar and its variants. This chapter treats of the origin and construction of the Sitar and goes on to discuss the recognized styles and important genealogies. According to the author, the Sitar "lends itself to such graces as wavy *meends*, *zamzamas*, light *gamakas* and *khatkas* which are the characteristic features of Dagur Vani".

To recapitulate some of the basic information on the development of Sitar music provided here, Maseet Khan and Raza Khan were the originators of the two main styles of Sitar-playing—the Maseetkhani and Razakhani *baj*. Maseet Khan, a descendant of Tansen, was a strict adherent of the Dhrupad tradition and composed his *gats* in movements of *sthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari*, and *abhog*. The compositions of Raza Khan (perhaps a disciple of Maseet Khan), on the other hand, consisted of just two movements—*sthayi* and *antara*. Moreover, Razakhani *gats* were all set to Teental and played in fast tempo.

The descendants of Maseet Khan, Rahim Sen and Amrit Sen, introduced some structural modifications in the Sitar in order to incorporate *layakari* and *jod alap*, and thus made it a more versatile instrument than the Veena. Sahabdad Khan, the author says, is generally regarded as the innovator of the new Maseetkhani style, "but it was left to the genius of Imdad Khan, son of Sahabdad Khan, to fully develop this new technique...":

... thus the old Maseetkhani *baj* which was mainly based on Dhrupad *gayaki* took the new form of Khayal *ang* from the time of Imdad Khan. It will therefore not be incorrect to call the present Sitar style Imdadkhani *baj*.

This tradition was further enriched by Imdad Khan's successors, Inayat Khan and Vilayat Khan, in our own time.

In this account of the development of Sitar music, one wishes that the author had dealt more fully with the contributions of other major instrumentalists such as Rameshwar Pathak, Alauddin Khan and, most notably, Pandit Ravi Shankar, who is only given a small paragraph here. The latter's services to the Sitar are far too important to be passed over—be it in the structure of the instrument, the *tala* component, or other aspects of modern *ragdari*. As in the previous chapter, the tuning systems of the Sitar from Maseet Khan's time to the present are provided here, as well as some examples of Maseetkhani and Razakhani *gats* composed by several masters. The genealogical charts are given in the appendix.

A small account of the Surbahar and its technique follows the section on the Sitar. The Surbahar, meant only for *alap*, has few practitioners at present. After the passing of Mushtaq Ali Khan in 1989, Annapurna Devi and Imrat Hussain Khan are among the few notable names in the field.

The Rabab and Sursingar are the subjects of Chapter III. The first section of this chapter deals with the Rabab—its construction, tuning system, appropriate *banis* and *baj*, as well as famous exponents of past and present times. The Sursingar, which combines some of the structural features of the Sitar and Sarod, is dealt with in the second half of the chapter. The author notes that all Sarod players in the past were also trained in Sursingar:

Ustad Alauddin Khan and Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan both had this training... under Ustad Wazir Khan of Rampur, and were highly proficient in... playing the instrument.

The Sursingar was analogous to the Surbahar in performance context, being primarily meant for *alap*. In the past musicians would play *alap* on the Sursingar or Surbahar, followed by *gat-todas* on the Sarod and Sitar. Birendra Kishore Roy

Choudhury and Radhika Mohan Maitra were expert Sursingar players.

Chapter IV deals with the Sarod in detail. An adaptation and improvement on the Rabab, the Sarod is especially suited for *madhya-laya* (medium tempo) *alap* and *gat-toda*. The contributions of Hafiz Ali Khan and Alauddin Khan and their successors are adequately discussed in this chapter, which also provides information on Sarod styles and techniques and the tuning systems of various Sarod-players. There is a brief comparative study of Sarod and Sitar *baj* followed by genealogical charts and Sarod *bandishes*.

In dealing with these instruments in successive chapters of the book, the author all along relates the prevalent styles to the *banis* of Dhrupad. While this is necessary in order to comprehend the historical evolution of the various styles in instrumental music, one must caution that the approach can be confusing if applied to our living music today. Adherence to Dhrupad *banis* in instrumen-

tal music, which the author seems to favour, cannot really be insisted on in a situation where even the established *gharanas* of vocal music are fast losing their marks of distinction. Distinguishing styles of instrumental music by Dhrupad *banis* would be anachronistic today when all manner of vocal music is replicated on instruments — the Sitar and Sarod in particular.

This book will benefit music scholars especially for its information on the Surbahar, Sursingar, and Rabab because this information comes from conversations with some great players of these instruments which are rendered almost archaic today.

The biggest irritant of the book are its proof-reading errors. So much so that one is often unable to make out the actual meaning of a sentence. The genealogical charts and the notations of compositions are similarly replete with errors.

SUNEERA KASLIWAL